

ICPS newsletter

Public participation is the key to successful European integration

The goal of the information policy of accession countries is to build a positive attitude in the public-at-large to the process of EU enlargement by keeping the public informed about the costs and benefits to be generated by integration, for the country as a whole and for specific societal groups. A democratic system of public governance, guarantees of human rights, and a market economy are the main features of a developed society. The process of Poland's integration into the European Union fosters the democratisation and the development of the national economy. These were the main conclusions of presentations given by Polish experts Michal Kurtyka, former head of the division at the Office of the Chief Negotiator, and Piotr Jaworski from the Institute of Public Affairs, at ICPS's seminar on "Public Participation in the Process of EU Enlargement: Polish Experience"

Government measures

Public opinion on Poland's integration into the European Union has been studied since 1990. The Office of the European Integration Committee cooperates with Polish and other European agencies in conducting research on public opinion.

Since 1991, the Polish government has implemented the policy of providing all interested citizens with free access to comprehensive information about the European Union. In Poland, a White Paper¹ was drafted and published; including three volumes covering economic aspects, legal aspects, and science and technology.

In the middle of 1997, in order to inform the general public on the integration process, the European Information Centre was established at the Office of the European Integration Committee. Its monthly bulletin, titled *Integration*, which was launched in October 1998, contains the latest information about the actions of the Office of the European Integration Committee and highlights the process of Poland–EU accession negotiation.

¹ A White Paper is a strategic EU document containing proposals regarding its actions in a specific area. A White Paper providing an official statement of government policy in a particular area is accepted as a basis for drafting new laws.

However, in December 1998 just 64 percent of the public supported Poland's accession to the European Union, while in March 1997 the level of public support had been 72 percent. The weaker public interest was partially caused by poor awareness of the society about the costs and benefits of European integration.

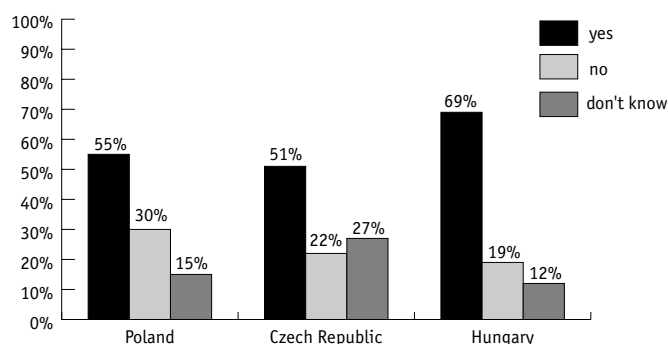
Public information programme

In May 1999, the Polish government developed and launched a public information programme. The programme is focused on increasing public interest in European integration issues, as well as creating demand for this information on the part of citizens. Another important objective of the programme is to develop a positive attitude in the public to Poland's membership in the EU that is achieved by informing citizens about the effects of the country's accession.

The target audience of the programme is the general public, including the following key groups:

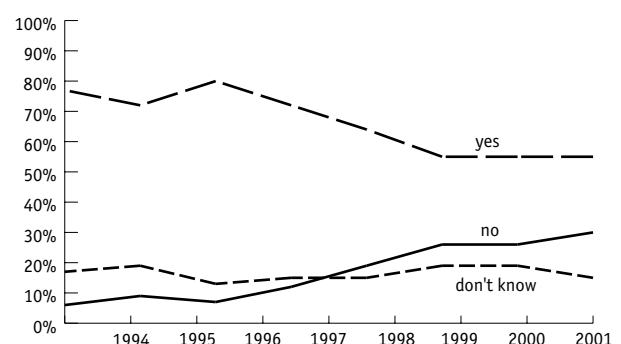
- centres of forming public opinions (policymakers, mass media, teachers, clergy, leaders of non-government organisations and professional associations);
- owners of small and medium companies;
- rural population;
- students.

How citizens support EU membership



Source: CBOS

How Poland's citizens support EU membership, 1994–2000



Source: CBOS

In the process of programme implementation, non-government organisations are the main partners of the government, with collaboration is grounded on the principles of partnership and public dialogue. Local governments of *województwos, powiats, and gminas* are also important actors, serving as channels for disseminating information and implementing training programmes to bolster applying local infrastructure. Mass media is another key partner.

The main source for financing the public information programme is Poland's state budget. The Office of the European Integration Committee coordinates programme financing. The European Union grants small additional funding for programme realisation. An estimated 40 million zlotys (UAH 50 million) is expected to be provided for financing the programme in 2003.

Public dialogue and NGO activities

The participation of non-government organisations in public dialogue is one of the prerequisites of successful implementation of the public information programme. NGOs promote active involvement of the public in the process of European integration by the following means:

- supporting the dialogue on European integration by organising competitions and coordinating the activities of school European clubs;
- strengthening public interest in integration issues by involving the population in the organisation of "European Days" and other actions;
- informing the society through periodicals and information centres.

The most active NGOs participated in the process of drafting and implementing the National Integration Strategy (1997), the Society Information Programme (1999), and the procedure for choosing candidates for the working group in the Poland–EU negotiations.

For example, the participation of Polish NGOs in implementing the public information programme takes the form of information projects and the establishment of regional information centres.

Conclusions

To develop an effective policy of public information on the process of European integration, above all the level of citizen awareness of these processes should be determined.

According to the findings of an expert survey on Ukraine's European integration carried out by the International Centre for Policy Studies, 68 percent of respondents believe that the Ukrainian press gives insufficient information about the EU history, its current state, as well as on integration processes. Moreover, 11 percent of survey participants believed that there was no information available on this issue.

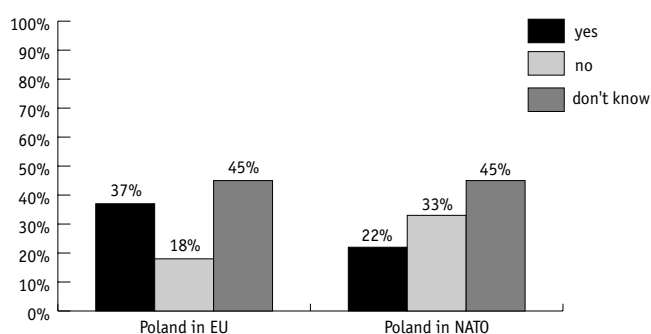
In order to change the situation in Ukraine, the following steps should be taken:

- involve the public-at-large in the process of European integration on the basis of information and educational activities;
- establish collaboration and dialogue between the government, NGOs, businesses, and mass media on issues of European integration;
- draft a government programme focused on informing the public about the European Union, integration processes in Ukraine, and the costs and benefits of integration programmes;
- actively source financing for introducing the information policy;
- involve NGOs in the process of Ukraine's European integration, particularly in developing strategic government documents. ■

The seminar "Public Participation in the Process of EU Enlargement: Polish Experience" was held on 19 June 2001. The seminar was organised by the International Centre for Policy Studies and the Instytut Spraw Publicznych (Polish public affairs research centre) under the project "European Choice of Ukraine: Using Polish Experience for Administrative, Budget, Regional, and Educational Reforms in the Context of European Integration". The project was made possible by support from the Freedom House Partnership for Reform Program.

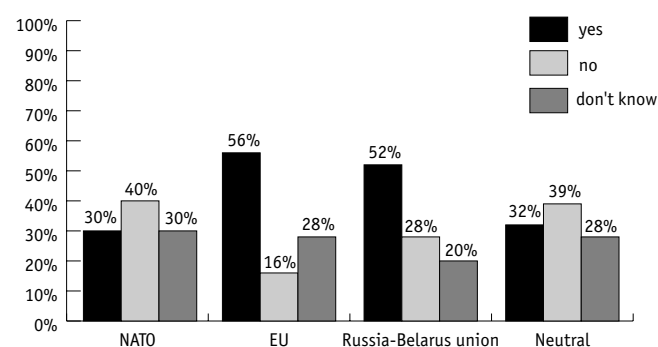
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Is Poland's integration useful for Ukraine?



Source: Instytut Spraw Publicznych, Warsaw

Is Ukraine in NATO, the EU, or in a Russia–Belarus union?



Source: Instytut Spraw Publicznych, Warsaw

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